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ABSTRACT

This report presents and analyzes the findings of a study conducted using the modified two-phase Delphi approach of the members of the Network for Effective Schools, an organization of State and local educational administrators and teachers. The survey identified 11 of the most vitally needed reforms in American education including: (1) Schools must accept and act on the idea that all children can learn. (2) Schools need to focus planning, budgeting, staffing, and evaluation on student outcomes. (3) Schools must have quality leadership, with emphasis on a sound mission of education based on strategic operational and problem-solving planning. (4) Schools must simultaneously address the need for both excellence and equity. (5) There must be a commitment to excellence by the school board, staff, and community. (6) There must be a clear statement of philosophy, mission, and goals for public education. (7) Schools must improve staff development and professional growth and renewal. (8) Schools must emphasize acquisition and application of basic reading, writing and math skills by the end of grade six. (9) Schools must focus specifically on what students should learn, including emphasis on higher order thinking skills. (10) There must be an effective linkage between assessment and diagnosis--appropriate education based on levels of development. (11) Schools must institute and require programs, such as the five effective school correlates, as prerequisites to leadership preparation programs. Members of the study group concluded that schools have the ability to enact these reforms to achieve expected results of: (1) higher student achievement; (2) a reduced dropout rate; (3) increase in student attendance; (4) a reduction in discipline problems; and (5) an improved student attitude about school. These findings correlate with effective schools research and, significantly, do not include concerns about teacher education and education finance. (KH)

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Expecting the Best

Effective Public Education For All Students

A Report of the Findings
of a Major School Reform Study

Conducted by

THE NETWORK FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Since 1982 there has been a "media blitz" of national reports on public education. Most of these reports have been critical of our educational system, and many have been delivered by people who are not practicing educators.

"Words, words, and more words," wrote Ann C. Lewis for the September, 1986, issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan*. "Reports. Criticisms. Recommendations. For three years the outpouring of public comment about the state of education in this country has saturated the American consciousness."

Many of the criticisms cited in the reports had foundation. According to a study by the National Assessment of Education Progress, half of the 17-year-old students in our schools could not identify Winston Churchill. Two-thirds could not place the time of the Civil War in the correct half century. In math, American children scored 13th among 17 countries. Dropout rates for blacks and Hispanics were 50 percent higher than the rate for white students. Education was in crisis.

National Reform Movement

The reports have had results. Starting three and a half years ago with then-U.S. Education Secretary Terrel Bell's *A Nation At Risk*, legislatures across the country have used the many reports to make changes in education. Here are some of the reforms enacted:

- Approximately 30 states have enacted career ladders for teachers.
- Thirty-five have initiated comprehensive reforms.
- Many states have increased student academic requirements for graduation.
- Forty-six states now have competency assessment of teachers or teachers in training.
- Many states have made changes in teacher certification and teacher accreditation.
- Fourteen states have initiated internships for beginning teachers.

Still, many problems persist. In fact, some of the reforms may have created more problems. In a recent publication by the NEA, this statement is made about standards in the reforms: "For a number of reasons these requirements are only marginally relevant to disadvantaged populations, and some of them may actually be harmful by creating additional barriers to high school completion without providing the resources and assistance for the disadvantaged to meet the new standards."

Educating the disadvantaged and minorities is no longer a task left to the inner city or a specific region of the country. By the year 2080, half the population of America will be what we now term "minority," and those minorities will live in all parts of the country.

The crisis in American education has developed because little emphasis has been given to what is known to work in education. Rather, when everything is tried in reform, everything will fail. American education must focus reform efforts on research and practice-proven solutions. Education must be effective for *all* children.

"The crisis in American education has developed because little emphasis has been given to what is known to work in education."

"School organizations have to speak out in regard to educational needs in the same manner as the *Carnegie Report* and/or *The Nation at Risk*. So far, we haven't even been a 'voice in the wilderness.'"
—Robert W. DeRonda

Need for Another Reform Study

Dr. Robert W. DeRonda, School Superintendent of King and Queen County, Virginia, and a member involved in this study, points out, "School organizations have to speak out in regard to educational needs in the same manner as the *Carnegie Report* and/or *The Nation at Risk*. So far, we haven't even been a 'voice in the wilderness.' We have been on the defensive side of the debate."

The Network For Effective Schools is one such school organization which is taking the offensive.

The members of this network believe that there is a body of knowledge developed from research that gives educators direction in developing more effective schools for all students. The basis for the research was developed by the late Ron Edmonds. Edmonds found that effective schools were characterized by:

- Strong instructional leadership
- An instructional focus
- A positive school climate
- High expectation of students to learn
- Measurement of student learning

Edmonds found that where these factors were present, even in inner city schools and in schools with heavy minority and low-income populations, schools were effective for *all* students. While these findings have been described by some as nothing more than common sense supported by research, many educators in the recent past had been led to think that they did not make a difference in the education of children. Educators were led to believe that they could not overcome poor family background in educating children. An educational malaise had set in.

Now, however, many educators have grown to believe in the effective school research begun by Edmonds. There has been significant progress in improving student achievement by using the research. As study member Dr. Phillip Harris of Phi Delta Kappa said, "Effective school research can make a major contribution to the impact the school has on each and every individual."

During the past several years there have been specific methods, techniques, and practices developed which help educators to implement effective schools in a variety of school settings. Not only has the belief about "what students can do" changed, but effective educator behaviors have been identified which help all students succeed.

Consequently, effective school educators, armed with research and results, must speak out on school reform. Although many of the present reforms in education are based on effective school research, many other reforms detract from the research and are even counter to effective schools. Effective school educators want to speak clearly with one voice about needed reform. Thus, they were willing to take their time for such a comprehensive study as this.

How the Study was Conducted

The Network For Effective Schools has a membership of over 250 nationwide from all parts of the education community and country. There are ten categories of members from superintendents to teachers, from state departments of education personnel to staff development directors. They join the Network because of a belief in the effective school research and practice and because they are striving to assure that all children learn.

The study was conducted using the modified two-phase Delphi approach. In the first phase, members were sent a form upon which they were requested to list the ten most vitally needed reforms in American education. Their answers were to reflect their experience and knowledge of effective schools research and practice. Over sixty of the members returned the form identifying a total of over 430 reform items. The 430 items were condensed and consolidated into 163 vitally needed reforms. The 163 items were placed into ten categories for easier reference.

In the second phase of the Delphi approach, the members of the Network were sent the 163 item list of the condensed reforms in order that they might select the final ten.

The results of the modified Delphi study were analyzed. About the same number of members responded to the second phase of the study as the first part. Although the number of reform items was large, it was feared that any further reduction of the list would jeopardize the results.

In addition to the selection of the ten most vitally needed reforms, members were asked to eliminate the items they felt were not vitally needed. Consequently, the agreement ratio was strengthened by having a positive and negative response system.

What emerged from the study was a list of the eleven (because of a tie) most vitally needed reforms in American education from the perspective of practicing effective school educators. This perspective is the key to the study and to its usefulness because it offers the reader a point of reference upon which to judge the results. Again, the results come from individuals who have both experience and knowledge of the effective school research and practice.

Findings

The responses were analyzed in three ways. A rank order of the ten most vitally needed reforms was found by calculating the responses with the most votes (again, there was a tie). A weighted score was calculated because each study member was limited to only ten positive responses. Finally, an agreement ratio was found by finding the differences between the positive and negative responses on each item. The less disagreement in responses on a single item there was, the higher the agreement ratio.

The chart on the next page represents the eleven most vitally needed reforms in American education as identified by the Network For Effective Schools study group.

"What emerged from the study was a list of the eleven most vitally needed reforms in American education from the perspective of practicing effective school educators."

NETWORK FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS
Eleven Vitally Needed Reforms
in American Education

	Weighted score	Agreement ratio	Research base
1. Schools must accept and practice that all children can learn.	416	98%	High Expectations
2. Schools need to focus planning, budgeting, staffing, and evaluation on student outcomes — i.e., measures of student performance, attendance, reducing dropouts, etc.	304	95%	Measurement
3. Schools must have quality leadership by the superintendent, principal and other administrative personnel with emphasis on a sound mission of education based on strategic operational and problem-solving planning.	272	93%	Leadership
4. Schools must simultaneously address the need for both excellence and equity - demanding high levels of achievement and insisting that learning be distributed among students.	272	95%	High Expectations
5. There must be a commitment to excellence by the school board, staff, and community. (Providing home/school relations is a most important component for building community awareness.)	256	96%	Leadership
6. There must be a clear statement of philosophy, mission, and goals for public education.	240	94%	Instructional Focus
7. Schools must improve staff development and professional growth and renewal.	208	92%	Implementation Process
8. Schools must emphasize acquisition and application of basic reading, writing and math skills by the end of grade six. Without these, future success may be limited, at best.	208	93%	Instructional Focus
9. Schools must focus specifically on what we want students to learn, including emphasis on higher order thinking skills.	208	92%	Instructional Focus
10. There must be an effective linkage between assessment and diagnosis - appropriate education based on levels of development.	192	91%	Measurement
11. Schools must institute and require programs such as the five effective school correlates as prerequisites to leadership preparation programs.	192	89%	Leadership

Interpretation of the Results

It is interesting to note both what effective school educators have listed as vitally needed reforms as well as what they did not list. As expected from effective school educators, the reforms reflect effective school research. However, the selection is dramatized when it is realized that the eleven items were selected from an original 430 suggested reforms.

There are several striking characteristics about the list as a whole:

- The reforms are the same as those based on effective school research.
- The items relate to the influence of educators at the building level and school district level. There was rejection of national requirements for the improvement of education. Calls for a national curriculum, national competency exam for teachers and administrators, and mandate for vocational training were rejected.

There is a strong message of the renewed belief that these local and state educators know they can make a difference in the education of all children.

- The list does not attack the needs of education at the teacher level as so many other reports have done. Note that in the list of enacted reforms in the "National Reform Movement" section of this report, many of the reforms have centered on the teacher.

There was very little support for a career ladder system for teacher advancement, a "bar exam" for teachers, nor for national licensing of teachers. The Network list seems to suggest that for effective teaching to take place, these vitally needed reforms for effective schooling must be in place first.

It is interesting to note the absence of educational reforms that have made news headlines. Items such as drug education, sex education, dropout prevention, and assisting students from broken homes were not listed as vitally needed reforms. As Michael L. King said in an article in *The Wall Street Journal*, "Schools can best battle drug abuse and teen pregnancy through the single-minded pursuit of educational excellence. Teachers and administrators can buttress that effort by presenting a living example of the joy and utility of learning."

- Number one on the list, and the item with half again as many responses as any other, has to do with educators' expectations for students. "Schools must accept and practice that all children can learn." That is, *school personnel* must believe and behave as if they believe that all children can learn.

It may be hard for the general public to understand the implications of this reform statement. The public may assume that educators have always done this. However, recent research has shown that there are specific behaviors used by educators which help all children achieve at higher levels regardless of family background. Educators have more recently become aware of certain school practices which have conveyed low expectations for some students. Lower expectations results in lower student achievement.

- The list does not include the finance of education or greater funding as a vitally needed reform. While most schools continue to be strapped for adequate resources, the study group evidently felt that the suggested reforms were more vital. In addition, the reforms listed do not call for a massive outlay of new revenue.

"There is a strong message of the renewed belief that these local and state educators know they can make a difference in the education of all children."

"The burning issue is not educational reform, but the outcomes associated with reform efforts. If the outcomes are not 'effective school'-driven then we may have reformed ourselves right back into another rising tide of mediocrity, but at a much higher cost."

—Mary Jackson Willis

Item Analysis

As stated before, effective school educators have developed a body of knowledge about school improvement. Effective school practices and research forms the background to what the study group has suggested as vitally needed reforms. What follows is a list of those top eleven reforms and some background on each. For those readers not familiar with effective school research, the background comments may be helpful.

Reform 1 — Schools must accept and practice that all children can learn.

Effective school research conducted by Ron Edmonds indicated that in effective schools, teachers and administrators had higher expectations for students than did those in less effective schools. Yet most American schools had developed programs which conveyed low expectations of minority and poor children.

"Questions, grouping, scheduling, etc., tell the story," said study group member Dr. Gary Mathews, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum for the Jackson, Mississippi Public Schools. "Teachers and administrators control these variables. How they do speaks louder than words." While most teachers and administrators say they believe all children can learn, many of their behaviors say otherwise.

Dr. Michael W. Nicosia, Superintendent at Wibaux, Montana, and member of the study group, put it this way: "High expectations which are well communicated lead teachers to believe in their ability to provide required instructional programs which result in student mastery of basic skills. High expectations naturally lead to a positive learning climate which is orderly without being ridged, quiet without being oppressive, warm, responsive, innovative, and supportive. High expectations make 'Monitor and Adjust' an instructional must.

"Through monitoring and adjustment of instruction, teachers will have the timely information needed to adjust, readjust, and reteach at the most appropriate moment. In short, if we communicate high expectations and recognize achievement, we provide motivation. Motivated teachers and students combined with research-based educational practices will always result in effective education."

Reform 2 — Schools need to focus school planning, budgeting, staffing, and evaluation on student outcomes — i.e., measures of student performance, attendance, reducing dropouts, etc.

Effective schools are outcome based. Edmonds found that effective schools had identified a set of learning objectives for student mastery and had a way of measuring whether or not students had mastered those objectives. Edmonds called these two characteristics of effective schools "instructional focus" and "measurement." Dr. Mathews comments, "This is our profit/loss sheet. Without it we lack knowledge as to our performance as school adults."

Mary Jackson Willis, Director of the School Council Assistance Project in South Carolina, puts it this way: "The burning issue is not educational reform, but the outcomes associated with reform efforts. If the outcomes are not 'effective school'-driven then we may have reformed ourselves right back into another rising tide of mediocrity, but at a much higher cost."

Reform 3 — Schools must have high quality leadership by the superintendent, principal, and other administrative personnel with emphasis on a sound mission of education based on strategic operational and problem-solving planning.

Ron Edmonds found effective schools had strong leaders who were concerned with the primary mission of the school — instruction. Edmonds found that these strong instructional leaders, among other things, established a collegial working relationship with the faculty and communicated the mission of the school at every opportunity.

Effective schools have a quality of leadership that is collaborative in nature. "I am convinced the time is ripe to heal the wounds that have divided our profession," observed Dr. Stanley J. Zehm, Assistant Superintendent in Selah, Washington. "This does not mean a return to the top-down, management-dominated orientation. It means the development of real trust; administrators who empower others will find they don't lose power, but gain support from those who share their power."

Reform 4 — Schools must simultaneously address the need for both excellence and equity — demanding high levels of achievement and insisting that learning be distributed among students.

Again, Ron Edmonds found that effective schools had educators who displayed high expectations for students. These schools provided equal opportunity for students, and quality education was also offered. Minority and poor students were not excluded from participating in meaningful educational activities because in the effective school it was though they would benefit. They were not "excused" from achieving because of their family background or low socioeconomic situation.

Effective school educators say that between 95 and 97 percent of all students can master the basic skills. In addition, they say that a school is effective only when there is no significant difference in achievement between the subgroups of the student population. That is, poor children will benefit from the instructional program just as much as any other group. In addition, educators in effective schools are not locked into the myth of the bell shaped curve — that there must be winners and losers. Effective school educators believe that all children can learn the basic skills.

Reform 5 — There must be a commitment to excellence by the school board, staff, and community. (Providing home/school relations is a most important component for building community awareness.)

Ron Edmonds was interested in identifying the characteristics of an effective school. It was his belief, as a result of his research, that schools can make a difference in educating students regardless of their family background and economic status. Had he not focused on what schools can do effectively, we may still be working with the idea that educators and schools do not matter.

Without a doubt, schools can become even more effective if they have community and parental support. Educators cannot be excused from helping children learn because some students are poor and come from a poor family background.

"I am convinced the time is ripe to heal the wounds that have divided our profession. . . . [This] means the development of real trust; administrators who empower others will find they don't lose power, but gain support from those who share their power."

— Stanley J. Zehm

Yet education is a community effort. In an article in *Citizen Action in Education*, April, 1984, David Seely made this statement, "If there is to be any hope of achieving excellence or real reform in American education, both educators and the public must shake themselves loose from the 'service delivery' mentality which has seen education as a function delegated to government bureaucracies. Education must become a community enterprise, not only in rhetoric, but in reality."

Schools cannot provide everything for students. There are things schools do well and things parents and the community do well. They must work together.

There is a strong relationship between this suggested reform and reform number 6.

Reform 6 — There must be a clear statement of philosophy, mission, and goals of public education.

"There is no consistent expectation by the public as to the mission of public education. Consequently, education is expected to do everything."

The members of the study group have recognized one of the problems in American education by suggesting this reform. There is no consistent expectation by the public as to the mission of public education. Consequently, education is expected to do everything. As Dr. Mathews said, "Any road will take you anywhere. The effective organization knows which roads, the exits, and speed limits."

Edmonds found that the effective school had a clear instructional focus and had clearly stated its mission. That mission embraced instruction, teaching, and learning. What's more, all the adults of the community, school, and family knew the mission. There was a clear understanding of what the school would be held accountable.

As mentioned in reform number 5, the school cannot be all things to children. It can do an effective job of teaching all students the basic skills.

Effective school educators talk a lot about vision. Effective school leaders have a vision of what effective schools should be. The vision has focus, can be accomplished by education and educators, and is measurable. Public education as a whole needs the same clear mission. Otherwise the public, legislators, parents, teachers, and school administrators will continue to argue about the purpose of public education and demand that education do everything and anything.

Reform 7 — Schools must improve staff development and professional growth and renewal.

While the effective school research does not address staff development, it is only logical that implementing the research includes the retraining of teachers and administrators. Effective school educators have found that staff development and training must be well planned, systematic, and grounded in effective teaching and effective schooling research.

In addition, real change takes place at the building level. Teachers and principals must feel some ownership and control of their staff development activities. The activities must assess and address the needs in the building level program. Consequently, the principal and faculty must be able to assess those needs and deliver their own staff development.

Reform 8 — Schools must emphasize acquisition and application of basic reading, writing, and math skills by the end of grade six. Without these, future success may be limited, at best.

This reform helps further define reform number 6. The study members believe that teaching the basics is the first step to moving on to other educational objectives.

Effective school researchers found that effective schools focused on assuring that all students mastered the basic skills. There is a belief that basic skills form the foundation to future learning and furthermore, teachers in effective schools believe that all children can learn the basic skills.

Reform 9 — Schools must focus specifically on what we want students to learn, including emphasis on higher-order thinking skills.

The members of the study group are again saying that effective schools have an instructional focus where all the adult parties know what is to be taught. In addition, the study group is suggesting the school staff identify the specific skills to be learned including higher-order thinking skills.

Reform 10 — There must be an effective linkage between assessment and diagnosis — appropriate education based on levels of development.

In his research on school effectiveness, Edmonds found that what was taught was measured. Effective schools were found to have measurement programs which assessed student progress in terms of established learning objectives. The measurement process in effective schools is used to assure that the curriculum is being delivered and that all students were benefiting from the instruction.

Reform 11 — Schools must institute and require programs such as the five effective school correlates as prerequisites to leadership preparation programs.

The study group, as we can see from this suggested reform and others, is concerned about the leadership in today's schools. The group again expresses its belief in the effective school research and practice, so much so that the study group uses the term "require" for the first time in the reforms.

"There is a belief that basic skills form the foundation to future learning and furthermore, teachers in effective schools believe that all children can learn the basic skills."

Summary

It has been over twelve years since Ron Edmonds released his findings on effective schools. Since then, a national effective school movement has developed. The movement has attracted national attention because of the results obtained in many schools that implemented effective school research and practices.

The members of the Network For Effective Schools have conducted a comprehensive four-month school reform study. The study reflects the members' commitment to the research and to the belief that all children can learn. Eleven vitally-needed reforms for American education were identified.

The members of the study group conclude that schools have the power and ability to enact these reforms. The expected results from these reforms should be:

1. Higher student achievement;
2. A reduced dropout rate;
3. Increase in student attendance;
4. A reduction in discipline problems;
5. An improved student attitude about school.

The public wants the best public education system available. The Network of Effective Schools school reform study suggests that the public should Expect the Best — Effective Public Education for All Students.

"Eleven vitally-needed reforms for American education were identified.The members of the study group conclude that schools have the power and ability to enact these reforms."

THE NETWORK FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS

The Network For Effective Schools is a network of professional educators who believe in the effective schools research and practice and who are striving to assure that all children learn.

The Network For Effective Schools provides for the exchange of information, the opportunity to recognize programs that work, the sharing of student achievement reports, actual case studies, and a forum for the future progress of the effective school movement.

Membership in the Network is on an individual basis and members receive the following benefits after joining:

- A one-year subscription to *The Effective School Report* (or add one year to present subscription);
- Quarterly newsletter with Effective School results and network membership list;
- Membership card;
- Membership certificate; and
- Access to the Effective School Hotline.

In addition to the above benefits, members are encouraged to share information about their schools and effective school activities through the newsletter.

More than 300 educators have already joined the Network, and have participated in projects such as this *Expecting the Best* report. Membership is $35.00. To join the Network or for more information call:

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